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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000356

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SUBJECT: President Tandja Realigns Cabinet; Six Seats Affected,
Minister of Justice a Key Change

Ref: a) Niamey 00341 b) 08 Niamey 00960

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¶1. (SBU) On May 14, President Tandja replaced six cabinet ministers in what is regarded as a preparatory move to a constitutional referendum designed to lift presidential term limits. Although some of the replacements appear designed to sideline members of parties critical of the referendum, others seem designed to punish others for various offenses. This includes Minister of Justice Mamadou, who appears to have lost his portfolio due to his integrity and unwillingness to yield to executive branch pressure to sway sensitive cases. Regrettably, his replacement, Garba Lompo, is pliant and pro-Tandja, and holds little promise for improving the performance of Niger's judicial branch. End summary.

Three Ministers Replaced and Three Reassigned

¶2. (U) On May 14, President Tandja ("upon the proposals of the prime minister and head of government") made several changes to the 31-member cabinet, as announced by Secretary General of the Government Larouana Ibrahim:

¶A. Minister of Justice - Mr. Garba Lompo replaces Mr. Dagra Mamadou, who moves to become Minister of Professional and Technical Training;

¶B. Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation - Col. Issa Mazou, current Inspector General of the Nigerien Armed Forces, replaces Amadou Nouhou;

¶C. Minister of Professional and Technical Training - Mr. Dagra Mamadou replaces Ms Maizama Hadiza, who moves to become Minister of Promotion of Young Entrepreneurs and Promotion of Public Enterprises;

¶D. Minister of Promotion of Young Entrepreneurs and Promotion of Public Enterprises - Ms Maidama Hadiza replaces Mr. Salou Gobi, who moves to become Minister of Youth and Sports;

¶E. Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts - Ms Sani Morou Fatouma replaces Ms Amadou Aissa Siddou; and

¶F. Minister of Youth and Sports - Mr. Salou Gobi replaces Mr. Abdoulrahamane Seydou.

Comment

¶3. (SBU) The change at the Ministry of Justice is by far the most important, with the incumbent being demoted to a lesser cabinet chair and his replacement being an unimpressive retread. Garba Lompo served two terms as president of the National Commission of Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties, wherein his service in office was marked by minimal GON progress on the human rights front, and a setback when he had the president of anti-slavery NGO Timidria detained for three months in the aftermath of a planned, and at the last minute GON-cancelled, symbolic freeing of more than 7,000 slaves scheduled to occur in Tillaberi region in 2005.

¶4. (SBU) Speculation is rife regarding the removals, which suggest the preparation of a pro-Tandja, pro-"tazartche" (Note: Hausa for "let it continue." End note.) cabinet and which may be followed by further changes in personnel in the wake of President Tandja's decision to hold a constitutional referendum (Ref A). Minister of Justice Mamadou may have lost his seat due to his integrity and independence, wherein he has resisted executive branch pressure to influence some high-profile and sensitive legal cases. Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation Nouhou may have lost his position due to the poorly managed Hajj in 2008. Furthermore, both Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation Nouhou and Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts Siddo, both members of the Nigerien Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP) may have lost their positions due to the party's May 9 announcement criticizing President Tandja's move to launch a constitutional referendum to lift presidential term limits. Finally, Minister of Youth and Sports Seydou may have lost his job due to Niger's disqualification in March 2009 from the Cup of African Nations under-17 soccer tournament in Algiers based on charges of altering one of its player's age, and/or due to his challenging the candidacy of a party incumbent for office in a Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) convention in early 2009.

¶5. (U) Previous changes of the cabinet during the past year have

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included the appointment of Amadou Nouhou as Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation in September 2008, replacing Kindo Hamani (Ref B), and Issoufou Bako as Minister of Environment and the Fight against Desertification in January 2009, replacing Mohamed Akotey. Under Niger's constitution, the prime minister proposes, the president appoints, and the National Assembly approves ministers from among the 113 members of the National Assembly. End comment.

¶6. (U) Minimize considered.

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